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No. 4508
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The Women of India

JULIA HALL BARTHOLOMEW

A Hindu Woman

The Confession of a Hindu

"My conviction is that the liberal education of women and the consequent happiness of the home is possible only in the Christian community. It is Christianity that permits the postponement of the marriage of girls. It is Christianity that allows widows to remarry. It is Christianity that gives fallen women a chance of reclaiming themselves from evil ways.—It is Christianity that gives free scope for women to receive complete education.—If ever the Hindus are to rise in the scale of nations, it must be by Christianity, and Christians only.—Man cannot do without religion."

The Women of India

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Three thousand years ago the Aryans, or "people of noble blood," dwelt in Central Asia, and worshipped the one true God. Gradually they degenerated and sank into idolatry. Then suddenly the great reformer, Zoroaster, appeared upon the scene, and, driving the idolatrous people over the mountains into India, established a faith which now claims about one hundred and fifty thousand followers who live principally in and around the city of Bombay. In this religion there is much that is gentle, gracious and poetic; but the one great vital defect lies in the fact that there is no Christ, no atonement, no forgiveness of sins.

These Parsee women are doubtless the freest, happiest and most enlightened women in India. For gems and soft raiment their wardrobes can scarcely be exceeded. They are the people of great possessions, and perhaps they lead the most easy, care-free existence of anyone on the earth. Yet the women who know Christ Jesus have much to give these gentle sisters.

Let us turn our thoughts to the Mos-

lem women who inhabit Northern India. No belief brings women to a lower level than this one. They are degraded and enslaved, deprived even of fresh air and sunlight by the horrible customs of the purdah. This religion came into India with the Persian conquerors and numbers a great majority of the inhabitants of the whole North. Mohammed claimed to have had a revelation from God that no women should appear unveiled in the presence of any man with the exception of her husband or a very near relative. A woman in the best Moslem surroundings is practically a slave; how much more awful the lives of those lower down in the social scale! One's heart aches when looking at the figures seen occasionally on the street, robed alike in black and veiled beyond recognition. Entering a mosque it is discovered that the women are not expected to worship in any part of the magnificent structure except in a small secluded apartment in one corner. Polygamy and divorce are sanctioned by the Koran, and universally practiced to an unlimited extent. A husband may divorce his wife at any time, without any reason, or any fault on her part.

The Moslem women are exceedingly superstitious. Amulets are worn to keep off evil influences, love-philters are used, and all sorts of quackery indulged in.

Of surgery and midwifery the Moslems, as a rule, are totally ignorant, and if their medical treatment is purely ri-

diculous, their surgery is piteously cruel, although never intentionally so. How great the need for Christian medical science!

The idolatrous people who came down from the Northwest in the time of Zoroaster, were the progenitors of the Brahmans. Conquering the native tribes, they established the system of caste, which has prevailed for thirty centuries. The Brahmans are the priests of the Hindu religion. They cast the horoscope at the birth of every child, mutter incantations beside the dying, and perform numerous rites and ceremonies.

Hindu women and girls are very ignorant. The priests think it is a mistake, or sometimes go so far as to pronounce it a sin to educate a girl. The girls must work in the field and do all the hard work as well as mind the babies. Many of the girls are married when about twelve years of age. Of course, there is then no chance for the missionary to teach them in school, so the work must be carried on in the homes. Wherever the Zenana system prevails the only means of reaching the women is by getting into the homes. Christian women must do this work, as a man cannot even gain an entrance into the Zenana. Sir Andrew Fraser says: "It is a sad and lonely life; and the only way in which women, who have to submit to it, can be reached by education, is for a woman to be the teacher and to go into the Zenana to teach." The Hindu mind is

inclined to great piety, but at the same time capable of harboring the vilest and most indecent thoughts. In some Zenanas the women use disgusting language and indulge in the most defiling thoughts.

The young widow is one of the saddest sights in India; her head is close-shaven, her meals are restricted, and her presence is everywhere unwelcome. The practice of burning wives with the dead husbands has been stopped by the British Government, but no doubt many a widow would prefer death to the unhappy condition in which she spends the rest of her days.

A better day is dawning for India, the flag of a Christian nation floats over her, and the missionaries are increasing in numbers and power. Women physicians are finding how much they can do for Christ and His kingdom by their healing power in this great land. No one can look into the faces of the women of India without praying that the Christian Church will send them the gospel speedily.

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